

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

JUNE 23, 1997

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LAST WEEK:

HOUSE AND SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEES SET ALLOCATIONS-

On Wednesday, the House Appropriations Committee set the funding totals that each of its 13 subcommittees will work from when writing fiscal 1998 spending bills. The Agriculture Subcommittee's discretionary allocation was set at \$13.65 billion. The Fiscal 1997 allocation enacted by Congress was \$13.01 billion. On Thursday the Senate set their allocation level at \$13.75 billion.

HOUSE AND SENATE BRIEFINGS ON AIR QUALITY-

USDA accompanied EPA representatives this week at House and Senate briefings focusing on the proposed PM2.5 air quality standards. EPA outlined the reasons for their belief that the more stringent standards would have only a minimal impact on the agriculture community. They explained that dust particles associated with agricultural production tend to be larger in size and therefore become a decreasing percentage of the smaller categories of measured particulate matter. EPA stated that in those communities that are out of attainment under the current standards, agricultural activities would not likely be the focus of compliance strategies. EPA, however, was not able to provide the guarantees that the committees sought. The committees did favor the development of the MOU with the Agricultural Air Quality Task Force (Chaired by Chief Paul Johnson) to ensure that agriculture has a strong voice in the formulation of air quality standards.

SENATE BRIEFING ON NRCS STRATEGIC PLAN-

On Tuesday, the NRCS Draft Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 1996-2002 was presented to staff of the Senate agriculture and appropriations committees. The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) requires that all federal agencies begin a new process of 'performance based budgeting' in developing the FY 1998 budget. As part of this process, agencies are required to develop strategic plans prior to September 30, 1997, in consultation with Congress. Views and comments offered by the Senate staff will be considered as the plan is finalized.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH - The Forestry, Resource Conservation, and Research Subcommittee (Chairman Combest, R-Texas) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold hearings on agricultural research.

June 17 9:30 a.m. 1300 Longworth Bldg.
Federal, state, and private efforts

June 18 9:30 a.m. 1300 Longworth Bldg.
Public and private partnership efforts

LEGISLATION OF NOTE-

The following bills of significance to NRCS and conservation were recently introduced:

Bill	Member	Purpose
S.781	Hatch (UT)	To set standards and procedures for federal “taking” of private property, including guidelines for compensation, taking impact analysis, and adjudication procedures.
S. 782	Lugar (IN)	To amend the USDA Reorganization Act to allow funds to be revoked that are disbursed as a result of an erroneous decision made by a State, county, or area committee.
S. 749	Dorgan/Conrad (ND)	National Grasslands Management Act. (Would remove National Grasslands from the National Forest System and provides for permitted grazing administered by the Secretary of Agriculture.)
S. 805	Lugar (IN)	To reform the information technology systems of the Department of Agriculture.
S. 849	Faircloth (NC)	Exempts farms and small business from estate taxes.
S. 845	Lugar (IN) et al.	Would transfer to the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to conduct the census of agriculture.
H.R. 1763	Gilchrest (MD)	Exempts farmland from estate taxes that is subject to a qualified conservation easement.

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THIS WEEK:

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE MARKUP OF FY98 APPROPRIATIONS -

The Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA and Related Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Skeen, R-N.M.) of the House Appropriation Committee will mark up FY98 appropriations for the programs under its jurisdiction. Full committee markup may occur soon after members return from the July 4th recess.

Tentative
June 25 TBA 2362-A Rayburn Bldg.

CONGRESSIONAL RECESS FOR THE 4TH OF JULY-

The House and Senate tentatively plan to recess on June 27 and 28 respectively and return to Washington, D.C., early in the week of July 7.

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LOOKING AHEAD:

SENATE BRIEFING ON BUFFER INITIATIVE -

The Chief, along with others in the partnership, will discuss the agency's conservation buffer initiative with Members of Congress and their staffs.

Tentative
July 9 2:00 p.m. 328-A Russell Bldg.

AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVERS -

The House Committee on Resources (Chairman Don Young, R-Alaska) will hold an oversight hearing on the American Heritage Rivers Initiative. The hearing will focus on the Council on Environmental Quality's request for comments published in the Federal Register on May 19, 1997.

July 15 10:00 a.m. 1324 Longworth Bldg.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH: REAUTHORIZATION - The Forestry, Resource Conservation, and Research Subcommittee (Chairman Combest, R-Texas) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold a hearing to review proposals on reauthorizing agricultural research.

July 16 9:30 a.m. 1300 Longworth Bldg.

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